

Pet First Aid

Knowing what to do in an **emergency** can be the difference between **life** and **death** for cats and dogs.



Pet First Aid

Being clued-up on first aid could help save your pet's life in an emergency. Our vets have put together this guide for pet owners to help you learn which steps to take should a pet become seriously ill or injured.

REMEMBER:
If you're worried about your pet, call your vet

Recognising an emergency

Your pet could need to see a vet as an emergency if they:

- ❃ Aren't breathing or are having difficulty breathing
- ❃ Are unresponsive
- ❃ May have broken bones
- ❃ Are having a fit/seizure
- ❃ Are having difficulty moving or coordinating movements
- ❃ May have eaten something toxic
- ❃ Have collapsed and can't get up
- ❃ Have been vomiting or passing diarrhoea for more than 24 hours
- ❃ Have been electrocuted
- ❃ Are unable to pee
- ❃ Are having a severe allergic reaction
- ❃ Are choking
- ❃ Are bleeding heavily



What to do in an emergency

- 🐾 Try not to panic. If your pet is injured, you'll be more help to them if you can stay calm.
- 🐾 Call your vet. Explain what's happened and let them know when you'll arrive. Follow any instructions you're given, for example emergencies may be seen at a different site. If it's an evening or weekend, you might get a message giving you details of your local out-of-hours vet.
- 🐾 Be careful when checking your pet and giving first aid. Pets can lash out when they're in pain which can injure you and cause more problems for your pet. If your pet has serious injuries don't try to cope with them yourself. They will often need treatment from your vet as soon as possible.
- 🐾 Don't give your pet anything to eat or drink unless your vet tells you to.



Be prepared for emergencies: it could save a pet's life

- 🐾 Keep your vet's name, address and telephone number stored in your mobile phone, and somewhere safe at home.
- 🐾 Keep a pen and paper handy to take down any important instructions from your vet.
- 🐾 Keep a pet first aid kit at home. If you're travelling, carry a mini pet first aid kit and make sure you know the details of a local vet in case of emergencies.

How to assess your pet's condition:

- 🐾 Is your pet collapsed?
- 🐾 Are they responding to you?
- 🐾 Are they breathing? If not, begin CPR.
- 🐾 Are they having breathing problems or are they breathing quickly?
- 🐾 Do they have pale (white or blue) gums?
- 🐾 Do they have any wounds or injuries?
- 🐾 Is their belly swollen?
- 🐾 Could they have eaten something toxic?

If your pet has any of these signs, please call your vet immediately.

Giving CPR to pets: our vets' advice

CPR is life-saving first aid given to pets if their heart stops and they aren't breathing. We would always advise owners to take veterinary advice and attend a veterinary-led first aid course, to learn how to deliver CPR in the safest way.

Unfortunately, CPR usually isn't appropriate or successful for pets. Those who have an underlying illness or disease are unlikely to recover, even if given CPR. However, CPR can save lives in some situations – for example, if a healthy pet's heart has stopped due to a specific cause, like drowning or choking.



What to do if your pet collapses



A for Airway:

- 🐾 Carefully pull the tongue forward. Putting your fingers near your pet's mouth can be dangerous. If they suddenly wake up, there's a good chance you could get bitten.

REMEMBER: *If the pet reacts or tries to resist you then they don't need CPR. Call your vet and tell them your pet has collapsed but isn't unconscious.*

- 🐾 Check there's nothing in the throat.
- 🐾 If there's something blocking the airway, remove it, taking care not to push any obstructions further down the throat.

B for Breathing:

- 🐾 Look and listen. Are they breathing? Can you see the chest rising and falling or feel breath coming from the nostrills or mouth?
- 🐾 If they're not breathing, immediately check for a heartbeat.

C for Circulation:

- 🐾 Place your hand or ear over the chest, where the elbow meets the ribcage. Can you feel/hear a heartbeat?
- 🐾 If you are sure there is no heartbeat, start CPR.

**DON'T
FORGET
YOUR
ABCs**



Performing CPR

- 🐾 Place your pet on their right side on a firm, flat surface. Dogs with barrel-shaped chests need to be lying on their backs and CPR compressions are done at the midpoint of the chest.
 - **For small dogs, use one hand, but for large dogs, use both hands interlocked.**
 - **For cats use one hand to compress the chest from both sides while they are lying on their side.**
- 🐾 Perform two chest compressions per second at the widest part of the chest. (Remember the song 'Staying Alive' – doing it to this beat is about right).
- 🐾 Each compression should depress the chest by one third to a half. The chest should be allowed to return to the normal position after each compression.
- 🐾 Keep your arms straight and if you have someone with you, swap regularly as the process is very tiring.
- 🐾 After 30 compressions, extend your pet's neck, close their mouth, place your thumb and forefinger in a circle around the outside of their nostrils and blow through your fingers and down their nose. Give a 1 second breath and 1 second release.
- 🐾 Check for a heartbeat.

- 🐾 If your pet still has no heartbeat and isn't breathing, repeat the process - giving thirty compressions and two breaths. Continue CPR, checking for return of a heartbeat and breaths every cycle, while getting advice from your vet.
- 🐾 While you perform CPR stay on the phone with your vet and it's helpful if someone else can prepare to move your pet to go to the vets safely.





Even if your pet's heartbeat and breathing return, you should take them to the vet as an emergency



How to move an injured pet

- 1** Stay calm - Reassure your pet with a calm, soothing voice.
- 2** Check safety - Make sure the area is safe for you and your pet.
- 3** Check your pet - If your pet has hurt their neck or back, avoid moving them and try to keep them still until you have spoken to your vet.

Carefully check for:

-  Breathing difficulties
-  Broken bones
-  Wounds
-  Heavy bleeding



Call your vet if you are concerned and don't feel confident in moving your pet. Your vet will be able to give you advice on what to do next.

- 4** Support your pet - Make sure you support their head, neck and back by putting one arm under their head and shoulders and another arm under their pelvis. You may need to call a friend, neighbour or someone nearby to help. As a rough guide, if your pet weighs more than 15kg you will need someone else to help you lift them safely.

Once your pet is securely supported, slowly and carefully, lift your pet on to a large towel, blanket or board. If nothing else is available, a jumper or coat can be used but make sure it's strong enough to hold your pet.

- 5** Move your pet - Check the route is safe. Speak calmly and place a hand on your pet to reassure them. Hold the four corners of the blanket, board or towel, bend your knees and lift them. Walk slowly, don't jolt them.

If your pet is unconscious, struggling to breathe or has a serious injury, take them to the vet ASAP. If possible, phone on the way to check they are ready for your arrival.



What to do if your pet is injured

It can be worrying if your pet gets injured. The treatment needed for a wound depends on its location, size, depth and cause. Anything more serious than a minor cut or graze should always be checked by a vet.

- 🐾 If your pet has a small wound that's not bleeding, flush the wound gently with water to help to remove as much dirt and bacteria as possible.
- 🐾 If the wound is bleeding heavily, apply pressure to the wound with a dry, clean dressing and call your vet straight away.
- 🐾 If there are areas of skin missing cover the wound with a clean, dry dressing and call your vet.
- 🐾 If your pet seems uncomfortable when you try to cover the wound, or if you don't have a clean dressing available, leave the area uncovered.
- 🐾 If there is something inside the wound (such as piece of glass) don't try to remove it and avoid putting any pressure on it. Your vet will be able to safely remove the object and clean the wound.
- 🐾 Deep or large wounds should always be checked by a vet.
- 🐾 All wounds, no matter how big or small, should be monitored for signs of infection as they heal.

If you are worried about your pet, cover their wounds, keep them warm and call your vet straight away.

What to do if your pet is choking

Choking can be a serious life-threatening problem that needs immediate action.

- 🐾 Firstly, check if your pet is choking or coughing. If your pet is choking they'll often be struggling to breathe. If they're coughing they'll still be able to breathe.
- 🐾 If they are choking and conscious, try to gently open their mouth to look for something that's stuck. If you can see a blockage, use forceps or a strong pen to remove it. This can make your pet panic, so never use your fingers as they could bite you by accident.
- 🐾 If your pet is collapsed and unconscious, check their mouth for a blockage, remove it safely and start CPR.
- 🐾 If you're unable to remove the blockage, call your vet as an emergency.
- 🐾 If you've removed the blockage or your pet is coughing, contact your vet for advice.



What to do if your pet is having a seizure

Seizures in pets can be very frightening for owners. It's important to stay calm and take steps to help your pet and keep them safe.

- ❃ Firstly, take children and other pets away from the area.
- ❃ Clear a space around your pet so they can't hurt themselves on any furniture or wires.
- ❃ Then, turn off the lights and keep as quiet as possible.
- ❃ Keep your pet cool. Don't wrap them up as they can easily overheat during a seizure.
- ❃ Monitor the seizure and make a note of how long it lasts.
- ❃ If possible, video the seizure to provide valuable clues for your vet.
- ❃ Don't try to restrain your pet - you might accidentally hurt them or they might accidentally hurt you.
- ❃ Call your vet immediately if your pet has been fitting for more than five minutes or has had more than one seizure in a 24-hour period. Otherwise, phone your vet for advice once your pet has stopped fitting.
- ❃ Once they've stopped fitting, give them somewhere quiet and comfortable to recover; they'll probably be very dazed and confused afterwards.
- ❃ Speak softly to them, especially if you need to take to the vets.

Road traffic accidents

If your pet is involved in a road traffic accident, stay calm. This will help reassure your pet and allow you to make rational decisions.

- ❃ Check the area for danger, stop any traffic and carefully move your pet to safety (if necessary). Be careful doing this if your pet may have injured their back or neck.
- ❃ Check for any life-threatening problems, such as heavy bleeding or difficulty breathing.
- ❃ Check for injuries, such as wounds or broken bones.
- ❃ Keep your pet warm - use blankets or coats.
- ❃ Get help from a vet. Take your pet to the nearest vets immediately, and call them to let them know you are coming.
- ❃ Make sure your pet is safe and secure for travel.

Remember: A scared pet in pain may bite out of fear. Be careful and use a muzzle or towel if necessary (but never on a pet that is struggling to breathe or has face injuries).



Heatstroke in pets

Pets can quickly overheat in hot weather.

Signs of heatstroke in pets:

- 🐾 Breathing problems such as panting heavily or short breaths.
- 🐾 Bright red gums.
- 🐾 Shaking.
- 🐾 Confusion.
- 🐾 Having fits/seizures.
- 🐾 Falling unconscious.

How to prevent heatstroke:

- 🐾 Never leave your pet in a car/caravan/conservatory/porch/shed, especially on hot days.
- 🐾 Make sure they always have access to shelter and shade.
- 🐾 Always make sure your pet has access to plenty of fresh water.
- 🐾 Don't walk dogs during the hottest part of the day – choose a time when it's cooler, such as early morning or later in the evening.
- 🐾 Avoid strenuous exercise like running and games (such as fetch) on hot or humid days.

If your pet has signs of heatstroke, take them to your vet as soon as possible. You can continue to cool them on the way.



How to cool your pet

Heatstroke can be fatal. If you think your pet has heatstroke, phone your vets and start cooling them immediately.

Avoid using ice or very cold water to cool your pet

Move your pet into a cool space that is out of the sun

Pour cool water over their body

Put them on top of a wet towel

Give them cool (not freezing cold) water to drink

Use a fan or air-conditioning to cool the air around them

A pet first aid kit

A good pet first aid kit will contain all the things you'll need to give simple first aid for small injuries at home. Even if you can treat your pet using your first aid kit, you should take them to your vet for a check-up as soon as possible.

Your first aid kit should have:

- 🐾 Gloves
- 🐾 Pet-safe antiseptic wipes
- 🐾 Pet-safe wound wash
- 🐾 Sterile eye wash
- 🐾 Wound dressings
- 🐾 Bandages
- 🐾 Cotton wool pads
- 🐾 Microporous tape
- 🐾 Tick tweezers/ tick twister
- 🐾 Tweezers
- 🐾 Blunt ended scissors
- 🐾 Foil blanket
- 🐾 A thick, old towel
- 🐾 A spare lead (for dogs)
- 🐾 Muzzle (for dogs)
- 🐾 For large pets, a blanket can be used as a stretcher
- 🐾 First Aid guide

*Never apply bandages tightly at home, as they can make wounds worse or even cut off essential blood supply. Always apply any wound dressings loosely so you can fit at least two fingers comfortably between the bandage and your pet's skin.

You can stock up on first aid supplies on our online pet store - pdsa.org.uk/first-aid-kit

TOP TIPS ON PET SAFETY AT HOME

- Tidy away toys and other items that could be swallowed/chewed.
- Keep human medications and cleaning products in a secure cupboard.
- Human food including **grapes, raisins, onions, xylitol** and **chocolate can be toxic to pets.**
- Avoid having poisonous plants such as **Lilies, daffodils, azaleas** and **tulips.**
- Check your pet's toys regularly for **missing pieces** and their **bedding** for any **damage.**
- Check your **bins are secure** from pets, especially any that contain **mouldy food, which can be dangerous.**



To find out more about poisonous items in and around the home, visit: pdsa.org.uk/poisons-at-home

EMERGENCY PET INFORMATION

Vet (name / practice name):

Vet's number:

Who can help in an emergency:

Microchip number(s):

Details of the emergency:

Pet's medical conditions:

Pet's medications:

RECOGNISING AN EMERGENCY

If you are worried, always call your vet for advice!

IT IS AN EMERGENCY - IF YOUR PET:

- Isn't breathing or is having difficulty breathing
- Is having a severe allergic reaction
- May have broken bones
- Is having a fit or seizure
- Is having difficulty moving or coordinating movements
- May have eaten something toxic
- has collapsed and can't get up
- Is unresponsive
- Has been electrocuted
- Is unable to pee
- Is bleeding heavily
- Is choking

**To find out more about
Pet First Aid, please visit:
pdsa.org.uk/first-aid-advice**

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SAVING PETS CHANGING LIVES